MARVEL COMICS GROUP

the X-MEN

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OUR TITLE IS SIMPLY "I, LUCIFER!" 'NUFF SAID!

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FEATURING: THE UNTOLD STORY OF HOW PROFESSOR X LOST THE USE OF HIS LEGS!

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X-MEN! THE MOST UNUSUAL FIGHTING TEAM OF ALL TIME!

"I, LUCIFER..."

A BANK ROBBERY ITSELF IS A SOMEWHAT UNUSUAL EVENT! BUT WHEN THE PERNICIOUS PERPETRATORS ARE ATTIRED IN THE GARB OF ***X-MEN,*** THE RESULTING TABLEAU MIGHT BE CONSIDERED POSITIVELY ***UNIQUE...!***

YOU'RE THE BIG RAZZAMATAZZ OF THIS JOINT, AIN'T YOU? WELL, YOU GOT EXACTLY ***TEN SECONDS*** TO OPEN THIS VAULT--OR ELSE US X-MEN'LL PULL IT DOWN AROUND YOUR ***EARS!***

ALRIGHT, ALL OF YOU! STAND BACK! I CAN DO MORE DAMAGE WITH THIS ***BASEBALL BAT*** THAN A HOMO SAPIEN CAN WITH A ***SHERMAN TANK!***

BUT--I COULDN'T OPEN IT ***NOW*** EVEN IF I WANTED TO! IT HAS A ***TIME LOCK***--AND IT'S SET FOR ***TEN O'CLOCK!***

IT'S A ***HOLD-UP!*** WHY DON'T THE GUARDS ***DO*** SOME-THING?

THEY ***CAN'T***--THOSE HOODLUMS HAVE THREATENED TO HARM ***MR. PHILBERT*** IF THEY SO MUCH AS ***MOVE!***

TWO ***NEW*** X-MEN? I NEVER SAW THEIR PICTURES IN THE PAPER! WHAT POWERS DO ***THEY*** HAVE?

I DON'T KNOW, LADY--AND I'M NOT GONNA ***RUSH*** 'EM TO ***FIND OUT!***

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I EVER HEARD OF ANYBODY ROBBIN' A BANK WITH A ***BAT!***

YEAH--BUT IF ANYBODY CAN PULL IT OFF, ***THEY*** CAN!

DEAR ME! I ALWAYS ***SAID*** THOSE RIDICULOUSLY COSTUMED MUTANTS WERE UP TO NO GOOD!

ANOTHER MIGHTY MARVEL BULLPEN SURPRISE!

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SO--THE VAULT CAN'T BE OPENED TILL TEN, HUH? WELL, HERE'S WHERE I *UPSET* YOUR PRETTY LITTLE SCHEDULE!

ME, I NEVER *WAS* MUCH GOOD AT *WAITIN'!!*

YOU *CAN'T* BREAK IN! IT'S *IMPOSSIBLE--!*

RREEEKK!

NOTHIN'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR AN *X-MAN,* RUBE!

--AND DON'T YOU *FORGET* IT.!

DONG·DONG·DONG·DONG·DONG

HERE, PARTNER! *I* DID THE HARD WORK--SO *YOU* CAN CARRY THE *LOOT!*

BE GLAD TO, PAL! FOR *THAT* KIND OF MENIAL LABOR, YOU CAN COUNT ME *IN!*

THE BIG GUY LET GO OF MR. PHILBERT! NOW'S MY CHANCE TO TAKE THEM WITHOUT *ENDANGERING* ANYBODY!

I'VE NEVER CLAIMED TO KNOW VERY MUCH ABOUT THIS *MUTANT* BUSINESS--

KRAK!

--BUT I *DO* KNOW THAT EVEN THE *X-MEN* AREN'T *BULLET-PROOF!*

I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GETTIN' YOUR *INFO,* RUBE, BUT I THINK YOU'D BETTER TAKE ANOTHER *LOOK!*

THAK! THAK!

THE BULLETS SINK RIGHT INTO HIM..! AND THEN THEY POP *OUT* AGAIN!

THE *OTHER* ONE DOESN'T LOOK SO INVULNERABLE! *WAIT!* WHAT *GIVES?*

HEY, PARTNER--GET THIS JOKER OFF MY *BACK,* WILL YA?

PWING PWING

HE'S SURROUNDED BY SOME KIND OF *FORCE FIELD!*

DUCK!

NO SOONER SAID THAN *DONE!* HERE, BUDDY--THAT LITTLE TOY WON'T DO YOU ANY GOOD WITH US *ANYHOW!*

MY GUN--IT'S *DEMOLISHED!* YOU GUYS AREN'T *HUMAN!*

SKRUNCH!

NEVER SAID WE *WAS,* CUDDLES! WE'RE *MUTANTS,* REMEMBER?

MEANWHILE, THE CLANGING BURGLAR ALARM HAS NOT GONE UNHEEDED, FOR...

OKAY, BOYS-- MOVE IN ON 'EM.!

USE YOUR CLUBS! FROM WHAT I SAW THRU THE BANK WINDOW, GUNS ARE USELESS!

WE'LL TAKE 'EM, CAPTAIN!

THEY CAN'T LICK ALL OF US!

HOWEVER, AS THE INCREDIBLE IMPOSTERS EMERGE FROM THE BUILDING...

-UHHNN--!- WE CAN'T EVEN LAY OUR HANDS ON HIM.!

OOOOF!

OF COURSE NOT, FOOLS.! NOBODY TOUCHES ME UNLESS I ALLOW 'EM TO.!

AND, A FEW FEET AWAY...

WE'VE GOT THIS ONE, CAPTAIN!

HE DOESN'T HAVE A FORCE FIELD!

WHO SAYS I NEED ONE? I GOT OTHER WAYS OF HANDLIN' THINGS!

YOU'RE TALKIN' THRU YOUR HAT, MISTER.! WE'VE GOT ENOUGH MEN AROUND YOU TO CORRAL AN ELEPHANT!

MAYBE SO, BUT YOU AIN'T GOT NEARLY ENOUGH TO HOLD ONTO... THE BLOB!

SO THAT'S WHO HE IS! ...NO WONDER!

HE TOSSED US OFF LIKE SO MANY RAG DOLLS!

AN' NOW, IF YOU DON'T MIND--

--I'VE GOTTA BE MOVIN' ON.! GIVE MY REGRETS TO THE JOE THAT OWNS THIS CAR!

I SEE IT--BUT I JUST PLAIN DON'T BELIEVE IT!

C'MON, CHUM! WE'VE GOTTA GO JOIN THE REST'A THE X-MEN!

THE NEXT MOMENT...

COME BACK HERE! COME BACK, I SAY!

DID YOU SEE THAT? NOT ONLY DID THEY ROB THE BANK--BUT THEY ALSO MADE THEIR GETAWAY IN PHILBERT'S LIMOUSINE!

MISTER, FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN, I'D SAY WE'RE LUCKY THEY WERE ONLY AFTER MONEY.!

ALL RIGHT, MEN--INTO THE CAR! NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, WE'RE GOING TO CATCH US SOME MUTANTS!

CITY BANK

FINE! BUT THEN WHAT DO WE DO WITH 'EM?

THAT SELFSAME INSTANT, AS A CAPRICIOUS FATE WOULD HAVE IT, ONE OF THE *REAL* X-MEN HAS JUST MADE ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT DECISIONS OF HIS ENTIRE LIFE...

THERE! I'VE *DONE* IT! UNTIL THIS SECOND, I WOULD NEVER HAVE THOUGHT I COULD FIND THE *STRENGTH!*

I'M *LEAVING THE X-MEN--!* THAT NOTE I LEFT WILL EXPLAIN THE REASONS--OR AT LEAST *SOME* OF THEM!

FOR, HOW CAN MERE *WORDS* EVER HOPE TO EXPRESS ALL THAT I FEEL IN MY HEART FOR *JEAN?*

AND YET, HAVE I THE *RIGHT* TO FEEL THIS WAY ABOUT HER--WHILE MY *EYES* MAKE ME A *THREAT* TO ALL I ENCOUNTER?

THAT'S WHY I MUST GO--TO SEE IF, SOMEWHERE, I CAN FIND A DOCTOR WHO CAN RID ME OF THE MENACE OF MY DEADLY *EYE BEAMS!*

UNTIL THAT DAY, THE WORLD SHALL HEAR NO MORE FROM THE ONE IT KNOWS ONLY AS... *CYCLOPS!*

WITH THESE THOUGHTS, THE TRAGIC FORM OF SCOTT SUMMERS DISAPPEARS INTO THE DISTANCE...

AS, INSIDE, UNAWARE OF HIS UNHERALDED DEPARTURE...

WANT THAT BOOK, JEANIE? LET ME GET IT FOR YOU--

DON'T BOTHER, WARREN! YOU FORGET--MY *TELEKINETIC POWER* CAN BRING IT FLOATING DOWN TO ME AT WILL!

HEY, GROUP! CATCH THIS CRAZY SCENE ON THE BOOB TUBE--IT'LL *FLOOR* YOU!

COME NOW, BOBBY--MUST YOU PERSEVERE IN SUCH BOISTEROUS EXCLAMATIONS WHILE I'M *STUDYING?*

WAIT, HANK! BOBBY'S *RIGHT!* LISTEN TO *THIS!*

--AND SO, DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF THE AUTHORITIES, THE ROBBERS *ESCAPED!* THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE DOUBT THAT BOTH WERE MEMBERS OF THE MYSTERIOUS MUTANT GROUP KNOWN AS THE *X-MEN...*

OH YEAH? I DOUBT IT!

QUIET, BOBBY--LET'S MAKE SURE WE DON'T *MISS* ANY OF THIS!

IT WOULD SEEM MOST IMPERATIVE THAT WE ENLIGHTEN THE PROFESSOR--*POST HASTE!*

PROFESSOR XAVIER--PARDON MY UNCEREMONIOUS INTRUSION, SIR, BUT THE TELEVISION HAS REPORTED A MOST SINGULAR OCCURRENCE--!

I KNOW, HANK--I'VE ALREADY MONITORED THAT NEWSCAST *MENTALLY!*

IN FACT, I'VE TELEPATHICALLY COMMANDED THE OTHERS TO *JOIN* US, AS I FINISH THE INSTALLATION OF THIS NEW *CEREBRO*!*

*MAGNETO POLISHED OFF THE *OLD* ONE IN *X-MEN #18*, REMEMBER? -- STAN.

AND, SCANT SECONDS LATER...

WE GOT YOUR CALL, PROFESSOR! THEN YOU *KNOW* ABOUT THOSE PHONY *X-MEN?*

SILENCE, ALL OF YOU! THERE IS NO TIME TO WASTE ON *WORDS!* OBSERVE THE LARGE *SCREEN* ON THAT WALL!

I'VE NEVER SEEN THE PROF ANY *GRIMMER* THAN HE IS RIGHT NOW!

THE *RADAR-IMAGE BEAM* WHICH I DEVELOPED WILL DETECT ANY OTHER MUTANTS IN THE AREA -- AND SHOW US THEIR *FORMS,* AS WELL!

HEY-- *THAT* ONE LOOKS *FAMILIAR!*

AS WELL HE *SHOULD!* IT IS CLEAR THAT THE MASSIVE FIGURE IS INDEED... *THE BLOB!* AND THE OTHER, THE MACHINE REVEALS, IS... *UNUS!*

UNUS, THE UNTOUCH-ABLE?!!

BUT, THE LAST TIME WE FOUGHT, HE PROMISED TO *REFORM* IF WE DECLINED TO IMPRISON HIM*!

IF HE'S *FORGOTTEN* HIS PLEDGE, I'LL *STIMULATE* HIS MEMORY-- AS *THE BEAST!*

WE STILL HAVE THE *RAY GUN* WE EMPLOYED AGAINST HIM THEN!

*ISH #8--S.

DON'T BE TOO *CONFI-DENT,* HANK! AFTER ALL, UNUS MAY HAVE DISCOVERED SOME WAY TO *COUNTERACT* THAT WEAPON BY NOW!

IN ADDITION, I SENSE THAT A *THIRD* ENTITY HAS MASTERMINDED THIS ENTIRE SCHEME TO DISCREDIT US-- SOMEONE *OUT OF RANGE* OF MY CEREBRO MACHINE!

PROFESSOR--I JUST NOTICED! *SCOTT* ISN'T HERE! COULD ANYTHING HAVE *HAPPENED* TO HIM?

YEAH! IT ISN'T LIKE OLD GAMMA-GAZE TO MISS A CHANCE FOR *ACTION!*

SOMEONE HAD BEST INVESTI-GATE HIS ABSENCE!

I'M ON MY WAY THERE *NOW!* I'LL FIND 'IM!

FIFTEEN SECONDS LATER, A BREATHLESS BOBBY DRAKE REAPPEARS--WITH DISTURBING NEWS...

CYKE..HE'S *GONE!* WALKED OUT ON US! HE JUST LEFT US A SHORT GOOD-BYE NOTE!

I *SUSPECTED* AS MUCH! SCOTT HAS SEEMED TERRIBLY *DIS-TRAUGHT* THESE PAST FEW WEEKS!

BUT, NO TIME TO WORRY ABOUT THAT *NOW!*

I MUST SEARCH MY MEMORY--TRY TO DISCOVER *WHICH* OF OUR FORMER FOES MIGHT BE GUIDING *UNUS* AND THE *BLOB!*

VANISHER! *MAGNETO!* *SENTINEL!* *MASTERMIND!* *JUGGERNAUT!* *SUB-MARINER!*

IT'S--NO USE! OUR ADVERSARY HAS SET UP A *MENTAL SCREEN!* THERE IS *ONE* NAME WHICH ELUDES ME!

BY YOUR EXPRESSIONS, I SEE THAT OUR HIDDEN ENEMY'S SCREEN HAS AFFECTED *YOU,* TOO! THERE IS ONLY ONE SOLUTION!

I MUST BUILD A *MECHAN-ICAL MEMORY-INDUCER,* TO QUICKLY PENETRATE OUR FOE'S DEFENSES! MEANWHILE...

SCOTT-- OH, SCOTT! WILL I NEVER *SEE* YOU AGAIN?

FOR ONCE, WE'RE WAY AHEAD OF YOU, PROFESSOR! IT'LL BE A RELIEF TO LET MY *WINGS* OUT OF THIS GET-UP, ANYWAY!

I'LL GET THAT RAY GUN! IT MAY *STILL* PROVE EFFICACIOUS!

YEAH--MAYBE IT'LL EVEN *WORK!* C'MON--LET'S *MOVE OUT!*

BUT, EVEN AS THE TEEN-AGE MUTANTS PREPARE FOR BATTLE, THEY CANNOT SUSPECT THAT, TWO THOUSAND MILES AWAY, ONE PAIR OF EYES--COLD, HOSTILE, RELENTLESS--WATCHES INTENTLY FOR THEIR APPEARANCE...

SO! THE DIE IS CAST! ***UNUS*** AND ***THE BLOB*** HAVE UNWITTINGLY DONE MY BIDDING--AND A FOOLISH WORLD BELIEVES THEY ARE RENEGADE ***X-MEN,*** MERELY SEEKING WORLDLY TREASURE!

LITTLE DOES ANYONE--EVEN MY TWO MASQUERADING MINIONS--REALIZE THAT I, ***LUCIFER****, HAVE IN MIND A PURPOSE FAR MORE ***COMPLEX,*** FAR MORE ***SINISTER!***

* THE VIVACIOUS VILLAIN OF ***X-MEN*** #9, RIGHT? RIGHT! ... OL' STAN.

"FOR, IT WAS ONLY DAYS AGO THAT, WHILE TESTING MY ***ULTRA-SCANNER,*** I DISCOVERED...

"***UNTOUCHABLE,***" HUH? WHEN ***I*** GET THRU WITH HIM, HE'LL BE UN***MEND***ABLE!

$100 TO ANYONE WHO CAN LAST THREE FULL MINUTES WITH ***UNUS*** THE UNTOUCHABLE NOW TOURING WITH SUPERIOR CIRCU

EASY, BLOB! I'VE HEARD'A THIS GUY! THEY SAY HE'S ***TOUGH!***

NOBODY'S TOUGHER THAN ***THE BLOB!*** I'LL TEACH THAT RUBE TO BRING HIS CIRCUS INTO THE SAME TOWN WHERE ***MY*** CARNY'S PLAYIN'!

"THUS, FATE HAD PLACED WITHIN MY REACH ***TWO*** OF THE MOST POWERFUL MUTANTS IN THE WORLD! AND, AS I WAITED, BIDING MY TIME...

WHAT'S ***THIS?*** HAVE THE LOCAL YOKELS RUN OUTTA ***MEN,*** SO THEY HAVETA SEND ***HIPPOS*** AGAINST ME NOW?

I'M GONNA MAKE YOU ***SWALLOW*** THEM WORDS, BUSTER!

"HOWEVER..."

I DIDN'T EVEN ***REACH*** HIM! HE'S PROTECTED BY SOME KINDA ***INVISIBLE SHIELD!***

BUT THERE'S ***NOTHIN'*** I CAN'T SMASH THRU... LEASTWAYS, NOT TILL ***NOW!***

YOU BLUNDERING FATSO--***NOW*** DO YOU SEE WHY THEY CALL ME "***THE UNTOUCHABLE***"?

YET, ANY ***NORMAL*** MAN WOULD HAVE ***BOUNCED BACK--HE*** WAS MERELY ***STOPPED!***

I DON'T ***GET*** IT! NOBODY'S HALTED ME LIKE THAT EXCEPT--THE ***X-MEN!***

NOW, ***THERE'S*** AN IDEA! WHAT IF THIS CLOWN IS A ***MUTANT***--LIKE ***ME?***

HE'S GETTING UP! BETTER MAKE MY MOVE--***NOW!***

"BUT, ***UNUS*** FARED NO BETTER THAN HAD ***THE BLOB*** HIMSELF...

CAN'T ***BUDGE*** HIM! THERE'S JUST ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER...

LOOK, MISTER--WHAT SAY WE CALL THIS MATCH A ***DRAW***? I'VE GOT SOMETHIN' I WANNA ***TALK*** TO YOU ABOUT--***LATER!***

YA TOOK THE WORDS RIGHT OUTTA MY MOUTH! COME OVER TO ***MY*** CARNY IN AN HOUR!

AND DON'T FORGET THAT ***HUNDRED BUCKS!***

"AND SO, SOON AFTERWARD, THE TWO ***HOMO-SUPERIORS*** MET AGAIN--LITTLE REALIZING IT WAS I, ***LUCIFER***, WHO HAD PLANTED THE IDEA IN THEIR MINDS...

THEN I WAS ***RIGHT***, BLOB--YOU ***ARE*** A MUTANT, JUST LIKE ME! I ***SENSED*** IT, SOMEHOW!

YOU AN' ME BOTH, CHUM! SO HOWZABOUT A CUP'A COFFEE WHILE WE SEE WHAT ***ELSE*** WE GOT IN COMMON?

"BEFORE LONG, INSIDE THE BLOB'S TRAILER..."

THEN IT'S SETTLED! SINCE WE'VE ***BOTH*** GOT GRUDGES AGAINST THE X-MEN, WE'LL FRAME ***THEM*** FOR OUR ROBBERIES!

RIGHT! AND WHEN THOSE COSTUMED CLOWNS COME OUT TO ***STOP*** US--WE'LL POLISH 'EM OFF, ONCE AN' FOR ALL!

NOW YER TALKIN'! I BEEN WAITIN' A ***LONG TIME*** FOR THIS!*

*SINCE ***X-MEN #7***, TO BE EXACT!--SMILEY.

OKAY, MARVELITES--THAT'S ENOUGH OF LUCIFER'S SANGUINARY SOLILOQUIES FOR THE MOMENT! NOW, AS HIS HUMAN PUPPETS COMMIT THEIR ***SECOND*** CRIME, THE EYES OF ***CYCLOPS*** ARE UPON THEM...

C'MON, BROTHER X-MAN--OUR CLUB TREASURY CAN ***USE*** THIS EXTRA LOOT!

I HEAR YA TALKIN', MAC!

TWO CRIMINALS--DRESSED IN X-MEN UNIFORMS! THAT BULKY ONE LOOKS LIKE ***THE BLOB***--AND, COULD THE OTHER BE... ***UNUS?***

YET, THIS ISN'T ***MY*** AFFAIR--FOR I'VE PROMISED MYSELF NOT TO BECOME AN ***X-MAN*** AGAIN--UNTIL I CAN ***CONTROL*** MY AWESOME, POTENTIALLY DEADLY POWER!

BESIDES, SURELY THE ***PUBLIC*** REALIZES THAT THEY'RE NOT REALLY X-MEN!

SEE, MABEL? I ***TOLD*** YOU WE SHOULD'A RUN THEM CRUMMY MUTIES OUTTA TOWN LONG AGO!

YOU WERE ***RIGHT***, HERMAN! ***NEXT*** TIME, I'LL ***LISTEN*** TO YOU!

NOW WE'RE ONTO THEM!

SO--THE CROWD HAS ANSWERED MY QUESTION FOR ME! I ***MUST*** HEED THE CALL--AS LONG AS ALL MUTANTS ARE REGARDED AS ***MONSTERS!***

EXACTLY ONE MINUTE LATER...

ALL RIGHT, YOU MISGUIDED MISFITS! ONE OF THE ***REAL*** X-MEN IS HERE! NOW, WHICH OF YOU WANTS TO BE THE FIRST TO CONFESS YOU'RE BOTH ***PHONIES!***

PHONIES? DOES HE MEAN THAT THOSE OTHER TWO--ARE JUST ***IMPOSTERS?***

I'LL BET THEY'RE ***ALL*** IN ON IT!

HEY, LOOK, PARTNER--IT'S ***CYCLOPS!*** WE THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER MAKE IT, CYKE, OL' BUDDY!

YEAH! HELP US WITH THIS MONEY-SACK, WILLYA, KID?

SURE, FRIEND--I'LL GIVE YOU A HAND! OR, PERHAPS I SHOULD SAY--AN ***EYE!***

I DON'T DARE UNLEASH A BLOW DIRECTLY ***AT THEM***--UNTIL I AM CERTAIN THEY ***ARE*** MUTANTS, WHO WOULD ONLY BE ***STUNNED*** BY MY POWER BLASTS!

ZZZZIT!

YA BLAMED NUISANCE! ***NOW*** LOOK WHAT YA'VE GONE AND DONE!

JUST LIKE ALWAYS--IF YOU CAN'T ***LEAD*** A HEIST, YOU TRY TO ***FOUL IT UP!***

I'M AFRAID WE'RE GONNA HAVETA ***PUNISH*** YOU FOR THIS--!

BLAST IT! THEY'RE STILL KEEPING UP THE PRETENSE THAT I'M ***ONE*** OF THEM! GOT TO MAKE THEM BLURT OUT THE TRUTH!

HERE, YOU FAKES! ***THIS*** OUGHT TO CONVINCE THE CROWD WE'RE ON OPPOSITE SIDES!

BRAK!

DON'T WORRY, PAL! YOUR ***FORCE SHIELD*** AND MY ***BULK*** WILL STOP US FROM GETTIN' HURT!

SURE--JUST LIKE CYKE ***KNEW*** IT WOULD!

LISTEN TO THEM! DO THEY THINK THAT HUMAN BEINGS ARE JUST ***SPORT*** FOR THE ***MUTANTS?***

YOU ***SAID*** IT, POPS! LET'S ALL RUSH 'EM--***TOGETHER!***

YES! IF WE LET THEM CONTINUE TO RUN AMOK, THEY MAY DESTROY THE ENTIRE ***CITY!***

GET THE ***YOUNGEST*** ONE FIRST! HE LOOKS LIKE THE MOST ***DANGEROUS!***

AS USUAL, A ***MOB*** SELDOM MAKES THE RIGHT DECISION! NOW THE CROWD'S TURNING ON ***ME!***

I-I'VE ***FAILED!*** INSTEAD OF ***HELPING,*** I'VE MERELY ALLOWED THEM TO DISCREDIT THE X-MEN ***FURTHER!***

LOOK! HE'S RUNNING AWAY!

SURE! THOSE MUTIES'RE ALL ***COWARDS,*** IF YA STAND UP TO 'EM!

BUT, AT LEAST I LEARNED WHO THE BOGUS X-MEN ***ARE!*** FROM THE WAY THEY SPOKE, THEY ***MUST*** BE THE BLOB AND UNUS--

--WHICH MEANS THAT I HAVE TO CONTACT THE ***OTHERS!*** PERHAPS AS A ***TEAM,*** WE CAN DEFEAT THE TWO EVIL MUTANTS--BEFORE IT'S ***TOO LATE!***

MEANWHILE, THE NEFARIOUS LUCIFER IS *ALSO* UPSET, THOUGH FOR QUITE DIFFERENT REASONS...

HAVE MY PLANS ALL COME TO *NAUGHT?* DOES ONLY *ONE* X-MAN DARE TO ATTACK MY COSTUMED DUPES?

IT *CANNOT* BE! I HAVE PLANNED TOO CAREFULLY! THEY *MUST* ATTACK--AS A *TEAM!!*

BUT--PERHAPS I SPOKE *TOO SOON!* FOR, THERE IS THE MUTANT KNOWN AS...*THE ANGEL!* HE FLIES TOWARDS UNUS AND THE BLOB!

AND, IF *ANGEL* COMES, CAN THE OTHER X-MEN BE FAR *BEHIND?*

THE NEXT SECOND, LUCIFER'S RINGING WORDS COME TRUE, AS...

DON'T FORGET, GROUP--'TIS THE *BEAST* WHO GETS FIRST DIBS AT OUR TWO ADVERSARIES!

YOU CAN *HAVE* 'EM, BEASTIE-BOY! BUT, I'LL BE HOVERING NEARBY, JUST IN CASE!

HOLY HANNAH! THREE *MORE* MUTANTS!

WELL, IT'S ABOUT *TIME* YOU GLORY-BOYS SHOWED UP! WE BEEN *WAITIN'* FOR YA!

THEN, ARMED WITH THE WEAPON THAT ONCE BEFORE DEFEATED THE AWESOME *UNUS,* THE ANTHROPOID X-MAN MAKES HIS PLAY...

IT GRIEVES ME TO THE QUICK, FECKLESS FOE, TO REALIZE THAT YOU HAVE DISAVOWED YOUR PLEDGE OF ETERNAL HONESTY!

NOW, PREPARE FOR THE *CONSEQUENCES* OF YOUR IMPRUDENT ACT!

QUIT YAKKIN' AND *FIRE AWAY,* FOOL! I DON'T HAVE ALL *DAY* TO LISTEN TO YOU!

AS YOU WILL, MY FRIEND! ONE DOSE OF *THIS* DEVICE, AND YOUR MUTANT POWER WILL NO LONGER BE YOURS TO *CONTROL!*

THAT'S STRANGE--HE SEEMS TO BE *REACTING* DIFFERENTLY THAN HE DID BEFORE...

MY NUTTY HUNCH WAS *RIGHT!*

I *AM* NOW *IMMUNE* TO THE BEAST'S BLASTED RAY!

AND, AS THE BLINDING GLARE FADES AWAY...

OKAY, YOU JUNIOR-GRADE GORILLA! NOW IT'S *MY* TURN --I BEEN WAITIN' FOR THIS MOMENT FOR MORE THAN A *YEAR!*

A TRUE PARAGON OF PATIENCE!

NEITHER OF THEM SUSPECTS THAT *I* AM RESPONSIBLE FOR UNUS'S IMMUNITY--AND ALSO FOR HIS "*HUNCH*" THAT THE RAY WOULD NO LONGER AFFECT HIM!

FOR, I POSSESS POWERS THAT THE WORLD CAN SCARCELY *IMAGINE!*

HAVE A *CARE*, UNUS! VIOLENCE CAN BE *SO* PLEBEIAN!

YOUR TURN, ICEMAN! THE STAGE IS *SET!*

STAND STILL, YA BLASTED MUTANT MONKEY! *GET* 'EM, BLOB!

I'LL TAKE OUT *THIS* PEST!

THAT'S *IT*, BLOB! JUST A LITTLE CLOSER..

=OOOF!= HE MADE THE SIDEWALK *ICY!* CAN'T STAND UP!

=UHHH--!= THIS WON'T STOP US FOR *LONG*, YA BLAMED BRAT!

MAYBE NOT-- BUT IT'LL SLOW YOU *DOWN*, ANYHOW!

SUDDENLY, HOWEVER, AN ATTACK COMES FROM A NEW QUARTER...

MADAM--I *BESEECH* YOU! WE'RE ON *YOUR SIDE!*

YOU CAN'T FOOL *US!* YOU MUTANTS ARE *ALL* MENACES!

WAK

=YIPES!= *NOW* WHAT DO WE DO?

MEANWHILE, WHAT OF THE HIGH-FLYING *ANGEL?*

UP *HERE*, OFFICER! SEE THE NICE BIRDIE?

I MUST DIVERT HIS ATTENTION FROM HANK AND BOBBY!

COME DOWN, ANGEL! DON'T FORCE ME TO *FIRE!*

OKAY--IF YOU WON'T SURRENDER, I'LL HAVE TO TRY TO *WING* YOU!

PTAK!

IN *MY* CASE, THAT'S A GREAT CHOICE OF WORDS!

JUST THE SAME, I'M GLAD THE PROF HAD ME SPEND AN HOUR PRACTICING *EVASION TACTICS* THIS MORNING!

AS, BELOW...

SCATTER! HERE COME THE *REST* OF 'EM!

WE'LL FINISH OFF THE *BEAST* FIRST --THEN THE FUDGESICLE FREAK!

YOU BETTER *BELIEVE* IT!

BEAST! *LOOK OUT!*

WE'RE SORELY BESET BY FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE, ALAS!

THEN...

=YOW!= WHAT WAS *THAT?*

IT'S *CYCLOPS!* HE'S *BACK!*

WHOOOM!

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CYKE! TALK ABOUT SIGHTS FOR SORE EYES! YOU SHOWED UP JUST IN TIME!

SO I SEE! BUT--WE CAN TALK LATER!

LOOK! ONE OF THEM BLASTED A HOLE RIGHT THROUGH THE PAVEMENT--AND TWO OTHERS FELL THRU IT!

WITH YOUR USUAL PERSPICACITY, CYCLOPS, YOU'VE PROPERLY EVALUATED THE SITUATION! LET'S DEPART, INDEED!

RIGHT NOW, WE'D BETTER SPLIT! THAT CROWD'S STILL ANGRY!

THUNK!

WE LANDED ON A SUBWAY TRAIN!

I'VE BEEN RIDDEN OUTTA TOWN ON A RAIL BEFORE, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS!

SHUDDUP AND KEEP YER HEAD DOWN! WE'LL BE BACK!*

*AND YOU CAN BET WE'LL BE HERE TO MEET THEM! ---SMUG STAN.

ABOVE GROUND, THE BONA FIDE X-MEN MAKE A HURRIED EXIT...

IT'S GREAT TO SEE SOME ACTION AGAIN! BUT WHERE'VE YOU BEEN, SCOTTY-BOY?

THAT'S MY BUSINESS, ANGEL!

SAY--WHERE'S MARVEL GIRL?

SHE HAD TO STAY BEHIND--TO HELP THE PROFESSOR! WE'LL FILL YOU IN ON THE WAY!

WHILE, IN A HIDDEN LAB...

SO! THE ONE I SEEK MOST STILL CLOSETS HIMSELF IN SECRECY, EH?

BUT, LUCIFER KNOWS NOT THE MEANING OF DEFEAT! THERE ARE OTHER WAYS...

BUT THEN, ABRUPTLY---

AH! MY MENTO-WAVE RECEIVER INDICATES THAT PROFESSOR XAVIER HAS ALREADY PENETRATED MY MENTAL SCREEN!

HE CANNOT SUSPECT THAT I DESIRED HIM TO FIND ME--THAT, IN LOCATING ME, HE HAS NOW SEALED HIS OWN DOOM!

MOMENTS LATER, AT A CERTAIN POINT IN THE GREAT DESERT IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PORTION OF THE UNITED STATES, A STRANGE, OMINOUS DOME APPEARS FROM WITHIN THE VERY HEART OF A CRAGGY MESA...

...YET, NO EYES SEE AND NO VOICE REPORTS THIS AWESOME SIGHT--ONE WHICH MAY WELL DETERMINE THE FATE OF THE EARTH ITSELF--!

AS THE OPALESCENT GASES THAT PREVENT ITS DETECTION FROM THE AIR FADE AWAY, AN AWESOME STRUCTURE HALTS ITS STRANGE, SILENT ASCENT! THEN, TWO MASSIVE PANELS PART--TO REVEAL A GIGANTIC **CANNON** THAT, ALMOST INSTANTLY, FIRES A BLAST OF **ENERGY** INTO THE ATMOSPHERE...

AND NOW, THE TIME HAS **COME!** ALTHOUGH I FAILED IN MY SCHEME TO LOCATE XAVIER--**HE** HAS FOUND **ME!** THAT WAS HIS FIRST MISTAKE IN DEALING WITH ME--AND IT SHALL BE HIS **LAST**, AS WELL!

NOW, MY POTENT BEAM WILL RIDE HIS OWN MENTAL WAVES BACK TO THEIR SOURCE--BACK TO THE PROFESSOR HIMSELF! AND THEN, THE FIRST PART OF MY TASK WILL BE **COMPLETED!** THE WORLD WILL BE...**OURS!!**

AT THAT SELFSAME INSTANT, A CONTINENT AWAY...

WITH THIS DEVICE, I HAVE MENTALLY PIN-POINTED OUR HIDDEN ANTAGONIST!

SO--IT IS *HE!* I SHOULD HAVE *KNOWN!*

PROFESSOR--WHO *IS* IT? CAN YOU *TELL* ME?

SUDDENLY, WITHOUT WARNING, BEFORE THE MUTANT LEADER CAN ANSWER THE ANXIOUS MARVEL GIRL...

HE'S *ATTACKING* ME--THRU MY OWN MIND! NO TIME TO PREPARE A *DEFENSE!*

MY BRAIN--IT'S *ON FIRE!*

THEN--SILENCE!

PROFESSOR--WHAT'S HAPPENED?

HE'S... SO *RIGID*, SO *UNMOVING!* IT'S ALMOST AS IF--

BUT *NO!* HE *CAN'T* BE DEAD! HE JUST *CAN'T* BE--!

I MUST CHECK--TO SEE IF HIS *HEART* STILL BEATS!

THANK HEAVEN--HE'S *ALIVE!* AND YET, HIS HEARTBEAT IS SO *SLOW*--HE MUST BE CONTINUING TO BREATHE BY SHEER MENTAL EFFORT! BUT--*HE CANNOT MOVE!*

THAT IS... *CORRECT*, JEAN! YOU MUST USE *MENTAL-WAVE AMPLIFIER*--AT ONCE!

IN MY MIND--I CAN READ HIS THOUGHTS! BUT, THEY'RE FAINT--DISTANT!

COMPLYING WITH PROFESSOR X'S URGENT COMMAND, JEAN ABRUPTLY DISCOVERS...

WHY--NOW YOUR THOUGHTS ARE COMING THRU MORE *CLEARLY!*

GOOD! THEN HEED MY WORDS--FOR I MAY HAVE LITTLE TIME!

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN?* WHO IS *RESPONSIBLE* FOR YOUR PLIGHT?

THIS IS THE WORK OF ONE WHOSE POWERS AND PURPOSE STAGGER THE MORTAL IMAGINATION--OF THE ONE I KNOW ONLY BY HIS EARTHLY NAME OF... *LUCIFER!*

LUCIFER! THEN--HE HAS *RETURNED!*

YES--SO LISTEN CLOSELY TO THE TALE OF MY *FIRST* ENCOUNTER WITH HIM! LISTEN, FOR, THE FATE OF *ALL HUMANITY* HANGS IN THE BALANCE!

"SOME YEARS AGO, FASCINATED BY TALES I HAD HEARD OF A MYSTERIOUS WALLED CITY IN THE SHADOW OF THE HIMALAYAS, I JOURNEYED THRU THE RUGGED TERRAIN OF TIBET...

THIS IS MY DESTINATION! I SEEM TO SENSE SOME OMINOUS, UNSEEN ***MENACE*** THAT LIES WITHIN--!

IT'S AS THOUGH MY ENTIRE LIFE, MY ULTIMATE ***DESTINY,*** WERE SOMEHOW BOUND UP BEHIND THOSE GRIM, GREY WALLS!

"AT THE GATE, MY SUSPICIONS WERE CONFIRMED...

IT IS ***FORBIDDEN*** THAT ANY OUTSIDER MAY PASS THIS GATE! YET--I BELIEVE ***YOU*** SHOULD BE ALLOWED ADMITTANCE!

THANK YOU! MY MISSION IS ONE OF ***PEACE***, I ASSURE YOU!

THESE TWO ARE UNDER THE MENTAL DOMINATION OF ANOTHER'S BRAIN! I CAN ***FEEL*** IT!

"INSIDE THE CITY, I WAS AWARE OF SINISTER EYES FOCUSED UPON ME..."

THE THOUGHT-WAVES OF THESE PEOPLE--THEY INDICATE ***ABJECT FEAR*** OF THE TYRANT WHO RULES THEM!

COME! IS THERE ONE WHO WOULD ***SPEAK*** TO A WAYFARER IN A STRANGE LAND?

SO! A ***VISITOR*** HAS COME! HE WILL BEAR CLOSE ***WATCHING!***

I WILL SPEAK TO YOU, MY SON! WHAT DO YOU WISH TO KNOW?

I AM INTRIGUED BY YOUR GREAT WALLED CITY, AND I WISH AN AUDIENCE WITH ITS ***RULER!***

NAY, BUT THAT IS ***IMPOSSIBLE!*** FOR, OUR MASTER DWELLS WITHIN YONDER CITADEL--AND EVEN ***WE*** ARE NEVER PERMITTED TO GAZE UPON HIM!

I CAN TELL HE SPEAKS THE TRUTH!

HOW LONG HAS THIS MAN BEEN YOUR OVERLORD?

AMAZING! MY SILENT PROBING REVEALS HIGHLY-COMPLICATED ***MACHINERY*** INSIDE THE TYRANT'S DOMICILE!

I--I DO NOT KNOW, MY SON! IT IS AS IF--TIME HAS CEASED TO EXIST FOR US --SINCE HIS COMING!

BUT ***HOW***-- AND ***WHY?!?***

NOW, I MUST GO! I CAN SAY NO MORE!

I MUST PROBE ***FURTHER***--LAY BARE THE SECRETS OF THESE DEVICES!

"EXERCISING MY MENTAL POWERS TO THE FULLEST EXTENT, I MADE AN INCREDIBLE DISCOVERY..."

THESE, THEN, ARE THE SOURCE OF THE TYRANT'S POWER!

BUT, THEY ARE MADE OF METALS NOT FOUND ON EARTH! THE ONE WHO HOLDS THIS CITY IN HIS SWAY--IS ***FROM ANOTHER WORLD!***

EVIDENTLY, THE MACHINES ENABLE THE ALIEN TO CONTROL ***SELECTED MINDS*** AMONG THE POPULACE--AND THESE, IN TURN, KEEP THE ***OTHER*** CITIZENS IN LINE!

OBVIOUSLY, THERE IS MUCH MORE TO THIS SITUATION THAN THE MERE ENSLAVEMENT OF ONE LONE VILLAGE!

"HASTILY LOCATING SOME OF THE MORE REBELLIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE AREA, I OUTLINED A PLAN TO THEM...

...THEN, I CAN RENDER YOUR NAMELESS MASTER ***HELPLESS***--IF ***YOU*** WILL HELP ME STORM HIS PALACE!

AY, THAT WILL WE DO! WE HAVE LONG AWAITED A ***LEADER*** IN OUR STRUGGLE AGAINST THAT UNSEEN FIEND!

THAT FOREIGN DEVIL MUST NOT LEAVE THIS DWELLING ***ALIVE!***

"BUT, I HAD UNDERESTIMATED THE TRUE CUNNING AND POWER OF MY RELENTLESS, VIGILANT FOE...

"FOR, EVEN AFTER I HAD MENTALLY SCREENED MY COMRADES, HE TOOK CONTROL OF THE BRAIN OF ***ONE*** OF THEM, AND SO...

BY MEANS YOU WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND, I HAVE LOCATED A ***TUNNEL*** INTO THE CASTLE! ONCE INSIDE, WE WILL OVERTHROW ANY GUARDS --AND YOUR ANCIENT HOMELAND WILL BE ***FREE*** AGAIN!

FREE! DARE WE ***HOPE*** FOR SUCH A THING?

LONG AGO, WE WERE OUR OWN MASTERS! CAN SUCH A DAY DAWN ONCE MORE?

IT CAN-- IF YOU ACT ***SWIFTLY!***

NOW--I STRIKE! ***DEATH*** TO ALL WHO WOULD REBEL!

"THE NEXT INSTANT..."

LOOK OUT! THAT CHANDELIER-- IT'S ***FALLING***--!

LUCKILY, MY MUTANT BRAIN SENSED ***TREACHERY*** FROM SOMEONE IN THE ROOM--NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON!

HOLD! WHAT TRAITOR'S DEED IS ***THIS?***

KRIAM!

BY THE ETERNAL--!

THE ***MASTER*** --HE ***KNOWS*** OF OUR PLOT AGAINST HIM!

I HAVE THE VILLAIN! HE SHALL MENACE US *NO MORE!*

-UHHNN--!

THE TYRANT MUST BE AWARE OF OUR PLANS! OUR ONLY CHANCE IS TO *ACT--NOW!*

WE SHALL FOLLOW WHERE YOU LEAD, OUTSIDER!

THEN COME--SWIFTLY! EVEN NOW, HE MAY BE PREPARING HIS *DEFENSES!*

"AS WE APPROACHED THE TUNNEL..."

THE FOOLS! DID THEY THINK ME *IGNORANT* OF THAT CORRIDOR BENEATH THIS ANCIENT CITADEL?

THE MEREST FLICK OF A SWITCH--AND IT SHALL BECOME THEIR *TOMB!*

THAT RUMBLING--! THE *WALLS* THEMSELVES ARE CLOSING IN ON US!

NOTHING CAN STOP THEM! WE FOLLOWED THE STRANGER--TO OUR *DOOM!*

RRRRRRRRRRRRRRR

NO--DON'T GIVE UP! KEEP STRUGGLING--THERE IS *STILL* A WAY--!

I MUST HOPE AND PRAY THAT MY MUTANT BRAIN CAN LOCATE THE MACHINERY THAT MOVES THESE WALLS WITHIN *MOMENTS!*

"FORTUNATELY, THE FATES WERE WITH ME--AND, FIFTEEN ANXIOUS SECONDS LATER..."

I'VE *FOUND* IT! ALREADY, AS I RIP THESE ESSENTIAL WIRES, THE WALLS BEGIN TO OPEN AGAIN!

BUT--WAIT! THAT HISSING SOUND BEHIND ME--!

A BALL OF FIRE--RUSHING TOWARDS US THRU THE TUNNEL! NO PLACE TO RUN--!

YET, THERE IS STILL A *CHANCE!*

WHILE PROBING THIS CHAMBER A MINUTE AGO, I DETECTED A **HATCH**, PLACED--**HERE!**

THE TOWNSPEOPLE ARE MOMENTARILY ENGULFED --BUT THE FIREBALL IS **EXTINGUISHED!**

SHOOSH!

OUR FOE HAS FAILED AGAIN!

"AND, INDEED, JUST A SHORT TIME LATER...

I CUT OFF THE SUPPLY OF WATER--AND THE FLOOD DRAINED AWAY IMMEDI-ATELY!

AND NOW--THE HOUR IS AT HAND! WE HAVE REACHED THE CASTLE OF THE TYRANT!

AT THIS DISTANCE, I CAN USE MY OWN **MIND** TO PROTECT THEIRS FROM THE ENEMY'S INFLUENCE!

LONG SHALL THIS DAY LIVE IN OUR MEMORIES!

"WHILE, IN ANOTHER SUBTERRANEAN SECTION OF THE PALACE..."

THE INTRUDER IS A FORMIDABLE OPPONENT! STILL, HE IS FORE-DOOMED TO **FAILURE** WHEN MATCHED AGAINST MY SUPERIOR MIGHT! NOW TO--

BEEP BEEP

--BUT WAIT --THERE IS THE SIGNAL OF... **THE SUPREME ONE!**

AGENT ONE--OUR RELAY SYSTEMS RECORD THAT PART OF OUR EQUIPMENT ON EARTH IS ***DESTROYED!*** WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

AN UPRISING AMONG THE EARTHLINGS, SUPREME ONE! IT SHALL BE ***CRUSHED!***

NO! TAKE NO RISKS THAT MIGHT PROVE FATAL TO OUR ***CAUSE!***

YOU HAVE SPENT ENOUGH TIME IN ***SECTOR "A"!*** A NEW SANCTUARY HAS BEEN READIED IN ***SECTOR "B"!*** PROCEED THERE AT ONCE!

I HEAR-- AND OBEY, SUPREME ONE!

I SHALL ***LET*** THESE INSIGNIFICANT BEINGS OVERRUN THE CASTLE! BUT, THE FINAL VICTORY SHALL BE ***OURS!***

"MEANWHILE, NOT FAR AWAY, I HAD PARTED FROM THE MAIN ATTACK FORCE...

THE PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN THE PALACE-- BUT THEIR FORMER TYRANT STILL ELUDES THEM!

IT IS FOR THE BEST! THEY COULD NEVER FATHOM THE TRUE NATURE OF ONE SO POWERFUL-- AND ***ALIEN!***

STILL, ***I*** MUST FIND HIM-- CONFRONT HIM! FOR, I FEEL ALL LIFE ON ***EARTH*** MAY BE AT STAKE!

"THEN, ROUNDING A CORNER..."

SO! IT IS **YOU** WHO HAVE TYRANNIZED THIS CITY! WHO **ARE** YOU--AND WHERE ARE YOU **FROM?**

MY TRUE PURPOSE YOU SHALL **NEVER** KNOW --BUT, ON THIS PLANET I CALL MYSELF ...**LUCIFER!**

AND NOW--THAT NAME SHALL BE THE **FINAL** THING YOU HEAR! PREPARE TO DIE--FOR DARING TO OPPOSE THAT WHICH NO MORTAL CAN COMPREHEND!

THAT GREAT SLAB--- RELEASED FROM ABOVE AT THE TOUCH OF A SWITCH! I--**CAN'T DODGE**--IN TIME!

"PINNED BENEATH THE INEXORABLE WEIGHT OF THE MASSIVE SLAB, I HEARD MY TORMENTOR'S VOICE THRU A MIST WHICH SEEMED TO BE ENVELOPING MY BRAIN...

SO--YOU STILL SURVIVE! **LIVE,** THEN--PERHAPS IT IS FATED THAT YOU AND I MEET **AGAIN** ONE DAY!

OHHHH--!...

"BEFORE MY EYES, A MOMENT BEFORE I LOST CONSCIOUSNESS, LUCIFER **DISAPPEARED**--INTO THE VERY WALL ITSELF..."

BUT, REMEMBER THIS--IT IS EVER THE **STRONG** WHO ARE MEANT TO RULE! AND **WE** ARE THE **STRONG!**

WHO DOES HE MEAN BY "**WE**"? IS HE ACTUALLY THE HERALD OF A FAR **GREATER** MENACE--FROM THE **STARS?**

THEN, AS THE PARALYZED MENTAL MUTANT CONCLUDES HIS STARTLING NARRATION...

THEN--**THAT** IS HOW YOU LOST THE USE OF YOUR LEGS YEARS AGO!

YES, JEAN! AND, IT IS YET **ANOTHER** REASON WHY I FOUNDED THE **X-MEN!**

FOR, I KNEW THAT ONE DAY MANKIND WOULD HAVE TO MEET THE RENEWED THREAT OF **LUCIFER!**

BUT, EVEN **XAVIER** DOES NOT FULLY REALIZE JUST HOW URGENT MANKIND'S PLIGHT TRULY **IS!** FOR, AT THIS VERY SECOND, BENEATH THE SOUTHWESTERN DESERT...

IT IS DONE! I HAVE CONQUERED THE ONE EARTHLY MIND WHICH MIGHT HAVE DISCOVERED MY INTENTIONS IN TIME TO **THWART** THEM!

AND NOW, THE TIME DRAWS NEAR, WHEN MY RACE SHALL FULFILL ITS MISSION--- ITS MAGNIFICENT **DESTINY!**

IN ASIA, I MANAGED TO EXTEND MY SWAY OVER AN ENTIRE CITY, AT ***CLOSE RANGE!*** BUT, MY EXPERIMENT WITH UNUS AND THE BLOB PROVES THAT ***LONGER DISTANCES*** ARE NOW POSSIBLE!

SOON, ***NO NATION*** SHALL ESCAPE THE TENTACLES OF OUR POWER! MANKIND SHALL EXIST ONLY TO SERVE ***US!***

ALL IS IN READINESS! ONLY ONE STEP REMAINS --BUT THAT IS THE ***GREATEST*** ONE OF ***ALL!***

AND SO...

SUPREME ONE, AFTER YEARS OF OBSERVATION, OF EXPERIMENTATION, AND OF WATCHFUL ***WAITING***--I CAN ANNOUNCE THAT--THE TIME HAS COME FOR ...***DOMINUS!***

AT LAST! OUR RACE HAS WAITED LONG TO POSSESS THIS INCONSEQUENTIAL WORLD--FOR IT SHALL BE A STEPPING STONE TO GALAXIES AND UNIVERSES THAT CAN EASILY ***DWARF*** THE PALTRY ***EARTH!***

THEREFORE, LET THE HUMANS AWAIT... ***THE COMING OF DOMINUS!***

MEANWHILE, UNAWARE OF THE EARTH-SHATTERING EVENTS WHICH HAVE TRANSPIRED SINCE THEY LEFT WESTCHESTER, THE FUGITIVE X-MEN PREPARE TO RETURN TO THEIR UNIQUE SCHOOL...

IT'S SAFE TO VENTURE OUT NOW! IF NO ONE SEES MY ***WHITE WINGS,*** THE ***REST*** OF YOU ARE IN THE CLEAR!

BOY! I THOUGHT IT WAS ***NEVER*** GONNA GET DARK!

DON'T RELAX YOUR VIGILANCE, BOBBY!

UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, CYCLOPS, THAT SEEMS A MOST ***SUPERFLUOUS*** PIECE OF ADVICE!

MAKING THEIR WAY BACK, THE FOUR MUTANTS DISCOVER...

MARVEL GIRL! WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ***PROFESSOR?***

SCOTT, YOU'VE ***RETURNED!*** BUT, ***TOO LATE!*** HE WAS PARALYZED...BY ***LUCIFER!***

LUCIFER? HE'S ***RETURNED?!!***

WHAT ABOUT THE ***PROF?*** WILL HE PULL THRU?

I...HOPE SO! HE'S GIVING ME DIRECTIONS FOR A ***BEAM DISTORTER***--FOR THE ***BEAST*** TO BUILD!

THEN START ***RELAYING,*** GIRL! AND DON'T STOP TO ***BREATHE!***

FEVERISHLY, DESPERATELY, WITH MANUAL SKILLS FAR BEYOND THOSE OF MOST NON-MUTANTS, A WORRIED HANK McCOY LABORS AGAINST TIME ITSELF! AND, FINALLY...

HURRY, BEAST--PLEASE *HURRY!*

THE PROFESSOR'S MENTAL MESSAGES ARE GETTING WEAKER--ALMOST *INAUDIBLE!* IF YOU AREN'T FINISHED WITH THAT DISTORTER *SOON--*

I'M...*TRYING,* JEAN! IT'S A COMPLICATED PIECE OF MACHINERY, BUT I THINK...YES, THAT *DOES* IT!

I ONLY PRAY...THAT IT *WORKS!*

AS A TENSE SILENCE GRIPS THE X-MEN, THE DISTORTER-HELMET IS PLACED ON THEIR LEADER'S HEAD, AND, ANXIOUS SECONDS LATER...

LOOK! HE--HE'S STIRRING! IT'S *WORKING!*

HE'S GOING TO BE *ALL RIGHT!*

YES, I--THINK I WILL--THANKS TO THE *BEAST* --AND *MARVEL GIRL!*

HE CAN *MOVE!* THE PARALYSIS IS *GONE!*

NOW, WE MUST *ACT!* THERE'S NOT A MOMENT TO LOSE!

THEN, AFTER A FAST BRIEFING ---

HMM! THEN IT'S MANDATORY THAT WE *ENGAGE* LUCIFER, EH?

WE'LL FIX 'IM, BEASTIE!

ANYTHING'S BETTER THAN WEARING *THIS* GADGET ANOTHER MINUTE!

QUIET, JEAN! LUCIFER ALMOST BEAT US *BEFORE!* IF HE'S STRONGER *NOW--!*

WHAT'S OUR PLAN OF *ATTACK,* PROFESSOR?

WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF LUCIFER'S BEAM, I MANAGED TO PINPOINT ITS *SOURCE!*

OUR DESTINATION IS...THE *SOUTHWEST DESERT!*

AND SO...

AM I SLIDIN' THESE CRATES DOWN TOO *FAST* FOR YOU, JEAN?

NO, BOBBY--KEEP THEM COMING! HANK AND I CAN KEEP UP WITH YOU!

THE WAY SCOTT *SNAPPED* AT ME A WHILE AGO! HOW COULD I EVER HAVE THOUGHT HE MIGHT *CARE* FOR ME?

BEAST! YOU MAY START LOADING THE *PLANE,* NOW!

WITH ALL DELIBERATE ALACRITY, SIR!

MINUTES LATER, A SEEMINGLY SOLID WALL OF THE STATELY SCHOOL-BUILDING RISES--TO REVEAL A SLEEK PRIVATE JET, POISED MOMENTARILY BEFORE ROCKETING SKYWARD...

AS YOU KNOW, I PURCHASED THIS PLANE SEVERAL WEEKS AGO--BUT OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH THE *SENTINELS* AND *MAGNETO* KEPT US TOO BUSY TO USE IT BEFORE!

YOU KNOW, BEAST, I CAN'T *WAIT* TO GET MY ICY MITTS ON LUCIFER! I DON'T *LIKE* HAVIN' PEOPLE THINK WE'RE *CROOKS!*

IT'S BEEN ESPECIALLY FITTED FOR SHORT TAKE-OFFS AND LANDINGS!

NOR DO I, MY FRIGID FRIEND! BUT, MORE THAN OUR *REPUTATIONS* ARE AT STAKE--IF I DEDUCE CORRECTLY!

YOU'RE RIGHT, HANK...

FOR, ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT KNOW THE PRECISE NATURE OF LUCIFER'S *MENACE* TO US...

...IT MAY WELL BE THAT *WE SIX* ARE THE EARTH'S SOLE HOPE FOR *SURVIVAL!*

NEXT ISSUE:
THE STARTLING, SINISTER SECRET OF...
DOMINUS!

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MINUTEMEN

Blunt

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